** This news release from K-State Research and Extension is available online at www.ksre.k-state.edu/news/stories/2022/04/family-bonding-thru-board-games.html

Note to editors: A photo to accompany this story is at https://www.flickr.com/photos/ksrecomm/51972778202

Released: April 4, 2022

**Game Play: Program builds family bonds, social skills**

Bonding Thru Board Games resumes post-COVID

By Pat Melgares, K-State Research and Extension news service

WICHITA, Kan. – At first glance, it seems as though the group gathered in a brightly lit room on the north end of Wichita has just gotten together for a good time.

The dice roll. The game piece moves a few squares. One player picks up a card. Then, everyone laughs at a new twist in this match of chance.

This is Bonding Thru Board Games, a fun-filled night hosted five times a year by K-State Research and Extension's office in Sedgwick County that has a higher goal than just good-hearted competition.

“Bonding Thru Board Games is an evidence-based family program where we use board games as a tool to strengthen family relationships and to expose children to life skills that enable them to have success at home, school and – eventually – the workplace,” said Elizabeth Brunscheen-Cartagena, a native Puerto Rican and family life and resource management agent who initiated the program in 2010.

The program was put on pause for nearly two years during the COVID-19 pandemic, but resumed earlier this year.

Bonding Thru Board Games focuses on Euro-style games – also called Eurogames – that are less abstract and require more thought and planning than many American-style board games, which generally involve more luck, conflict and drama. Some examples of Eurogames include Azul, Forbidden Island, Ticket to Ride and Kids of Carcassonne.
Brunscheen-Cartagena said research has proven the benefits of board games in contributing to six traits of strong and successful families, including:

- Enjoyable time together.
- Appreciation and affection.
- Positive communication.
- Spiritual well-being.
- Successful stress and crisis management.
- Commitment to each other.

“Kids today are more into their electronics,” Brunscheen-Cartagena said, “but once you introduce something else that you can do as a family, they discover that they really love that time.”

Brunscheen-Cartagena said an aspect of many Eurogames that benefits her program is that players are never eliminated from play.

“That is a key component for our program,” she said. “We want players to play from beginning to end. When we play together, we shape and model each other, including personalities, thoughts, decisions and more. It’s really a fertile ground to exercise life skills with no real consequences. We can’t kick somebody out, because maybe what they bring to us will be missed (if they’re not in the game).”

Brunscheen-Cartagena has written two bilingual publications on the benefits of playing board games, both available for free through the K-State Research and Extension bookstore:

- Developing the six traits of strong families.
- Developing vital soft skills for school and workforce.

“We know that academic skills are often a focus of the school year, but soft skills – or interpersonal skills – are actually more predictive of outcomes into adulthood,” she said. “Over time, as the workplace has modernized around the world, employers have reported a gap in soft skills. An employee may be good as an engineer, but they don’t want to interact with people… they don’t get along. Soft skills are needed.”

While the Sedgwick County program is growing in popularity in the community, Brunscheen-Cartagena said her own family has routinely played board games at home for many years. “It’s part of your learning, having that family night (and) continually sharing time together in that way. I want every family to know about this resource so that they may improve and strengthen their relationships.”

More information is available online through the Sedgwick County extension office, and on the Bonding Thru Board Games Facebook page.

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FOR PRINT PUBLICATIONS: Links used in this story
Bonding Thru Board Games, www.sedgwick.k-state.edu/home-family/relationships/index.html

Developing the six traits of strong families, www.bookstore.ksre.ksu.edu/pubs/MF3401.pdf

Developing vital soft skills for school and workforce,

Family relationships (Sedgwick County extension), www.sedgwick.k-state.edu/home-family/relationships/index.html

Bonding Thru Board Games (Facebook), www.facebook.com/meeplebond

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